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ABSTRACT

An ongoing 5-year study of Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA) implementation in four rural Kentucky school districts explores the establishment of school-based decision making (SBDM) in the 20 schools in the districts. In the 3 years since KERA took effect, 10 of the 20 schools have adopted SBDM. The paper focuses primarily on the seven schools that began formal implementation in 1991-92. Only one of the seven school councils studied practiced balanced decision making where all members (principal, teachers, and parents) participated as equals in discussion and decisions. In three councils, teachers and principals dominated decision making, although parents at two of these schools have begun to play a stronger role. The remaining three councils served as advisory groups to the principal and did not appear to be moving toward broader participation in decision making. Councils that practiced some level of shared decision making made key decisions in such areas as budgeting, scheduling, and to some extent, curriculum. All councils, regardless of their decision-making mode, participated in decisions about personnel and, to some extent, discipline. Beyond making decisions in these two areas, councils that played an advisory role to the principal mostly rubber-stamped decisions made by the principal or teacher committees. Factors that contributed to effective SBDM implementation were the principal's support and facilitation of SBDM, leadership by other council members, attentiveness to the need for parent involvement, and council training. The reverse of these impeded implementation. (KS)

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SCHOOL-BASED DECISION MAKING IN RURAL KENTUCKY SCHOOLS:

Interim Findings of a Five-Year. Longitudinal Study

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
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INTRODUCTION

School-based decision making (SBDM)--alternately referred to as site-based management, school-based management, or other similar terms--is a central feature of "Wave Two" education restructuring efforts (Murphy, 1990). Definitions of the concept vary, but all sources agree that SBDM involves devolution of authority for certain educational decisions from district or state offices to local schools (Ceperly, 1991; Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1993; David, 1993; Murphy, 1990; Midgley & Wood, 1993; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993). The premise underlying this authority shift is that those closest to students are best equipped to make decisions about how to help students succeed in school (Hall & Galluzzo, 1991; Hill, Bonan, & Warner, 1992; Midgley & Wood, 1993; Murphy, 1990; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1993).

SBDM is a key feature of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). KERA mandates restructuring all aspects of education as a result of a state supreme court decision that Kentucky's entire system of public schooling was unconstitutional. Unlike some restructuring laws, KERA does not identify SBDM as the vehicle through which restructuring will be enacted, although many educators and policymakers view it as such. SBDM is just one of many mandated components of KERA.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) has undertaken a five-year study of KERA implementation in four rural Kentucky school districts containing a total of 20 schools. SBDM is one of six aspects of KERA that AEL is studying closely.

When we began our study during the 1990-91 school year, only one school each in two of the four districts had voted to implement SBDM. In a third district, the school board (as mandated by KERA) appointed a school after teachers at all schools voted against SBDM. By contrast, at the urging of the superintendent, four of the five schools in the fourth district voted for SBDM in the spring of 1991.

No further movement toward SBDM occurred during 1991-92, in contrast to developments statewide (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993). Since the spring of 1993, three more schools have voted to implement SBDM. As of this writing, ten of the 20 schools in the four districts have adopted SBDM: three high schools and seven elementary schools. This paper focuses primarily on the seven schools that began formal implementation in 1991-92.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

In examining the implementation of SBDM, the research team was guided by three, inter-related questions:

(1) To what extent and in what manner is decision-making shared among the role groups involved in SBDM?

(2) In what way does the extent of shared decision-making affect educational reform in the schools?

(3) What factors facilitate or impede effective SBDM?

Our findings for the first two- and one-half years of SBDM implementation are as follows:

- SBDM, as mandated by KERA, gives councils significant authority over school functioning if they choose to exercise it.

- Only one of the seven school councils studied practice balanced decision-making, where all members (principal, teachers, and parents) participated as equals in discussions and decisions. In three councils, teachers and principals dominated decision-making, although parents at two of these schools have begun to play a stronger role. The remaining three councils served as advisory groups to the principal and do not appear to be moving toward broader participation in decision-making.

- Councils that practiced some level of shared decision-making made key decisions in such areas as instructional budgeting, scheduling, and to some extent, curriculum. All councils, regardless of their decision-making mode, participated in decisions about personnel and, to some extent, discipline. Beyond making decisions in these two areas, councils that played an advisory role to the principal mostly rubber-stamped decisions made by the principal or teacher committees.

- Factors that contributed to effective SBDM implementation were the principal's support and facilitation of SBDM, leadership by other council members, attentiveness to the need for parent involvement, and council training. The reverse in any of these areas impeded SBDM implementation.

Our discussion begins with an overview of the Kentucky SBDM statutes and an explanation of our methodology, and is followed by an in-depth discussion of the major findings listed above.

OVERVIEW OF THE KENTUCKY SBDM STATUTES (KRS 160.345)

Kentucky statutes require each board of education to adopt an SBDM implementation policy by January 1, 1991. At least one school in every district, except those containing only one school, was required to implement SBDM by June 30, 1991. If no faculty voted for SBDM (by two-thirds majority) by that date, the local school board was required to appoint a school. All schools in the Commonwealth must implement SBDM by July 1, 1996 unless they are the only school in the district. Schools achieving at or above the threshold level for student success defined by the state may also be exempted from SBDM if a majority of faculty votes to do so and the school requests an exemption from the State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education.

The SBDM council consists of the principal, who acts as chair; three teachers, elected by a majority of teachers at the school; and two parents, elected by the parent members of the parent-teacher organization (PTO) or, if no PTO exists, by parents at a special meeting to elect parent council members. Council membership may be increased proportionately. Council members serve one-year terms, but may serve consecutive terms if permitted by council by-laws. Schools may apply to the State Board for an alternative council structure. In considering alternative models, the State Board requires that parents make up at least one-third of the council. Councils may elect their own chairs if they apply to the state board for an alternative structure.

KERA specifies that certified staff (teachers and administrators) may participate in SBDM by serving on committees. The law directs local boards to create policy that addresses ways in which parents, citizens, and community members may participate in SBDM.

Councils have the following responsibilities:

meet the goals established in KERA (contained in KRS 158.645 and KRS 158.6451);

- Determine the frequency of and agenda for meetings;
- Determine, within the limits of available funds, the number of persons to be employed in each job classification;
- Select a principal when a vacancy occurs;
- Consult with the principal in filling staff vacancies;
- Determine what textbooks, instructional materials, and student support services will be provided;
- Set policy in nine areas:

  (1) Determination of curriculum, including needs assessment and curriculum development;
  (2) Assignment of all instructional and noninstructional time;
  (3) Assignment of students to classes and programs within the school;
  (4) Determination of the schedule of the school day and week, subject to the beginning and ending times of the school day and school calendar year as established by the local board;
  (5) Determination of use of school space during the day;
  (6) Planning and resolution of issues regarding instructional practices;
  (7) Selection and implementation of discipline and classroom management techniques, including responsibilities of the student, parent, teacher, counselor, and principal;
  (8) Selection of extracurricular programs and determination of policies relating to student participation based on academic qualifications and attendance requirements, program evaluation and supervision; and
  (9) Set procedures, consistent with local school board policy for determining alignment with state standards, technology utilization, and program appraisal.

The local board policy on SBDM must address procedures for council participation in decisions related to school budget and administration, student assessment, school improvement plans, and professional development plans. In addition, local boards may grant school councils any other authority permitted by law (Kentucky Department of Education, 1992; Kentucky State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education, 1993).

METHODOLOGY

The AEL study is qualitative in nature, with each of four researchers assigned primary responsibility for documenting KERA implementation in one of the study districts. Because councils were not up and running until the 1991-92 school year, the data reported below are based on two- and one-half years of fieldwork.

In the first two years of SBDM implementation, the quantity and type of research activities differed to some degree from one district to the next. Each researcher, however, completed the following minimum list of activities relative to SBDM in her assigned district: two superintendent interviews, one school board member interview, observation of one school board meeting per year, analysis of all school board meeting minutes, and analysis of local newspaper articles and announcements; and at each school implementing SBDM, one principal interview per year, one teacher council member interview, one

parent council member interview, observation of three council meetings per year, and analysis of all council meeting minutes.

For the current school year (1993-94), the research team is observing meetings of all councils at least bi-monthly, reviewing minutes of all council and school board meetings, and reading local newspaper articles. Interviews will be conducted with some council members and district administrators near the end of the school year.

SBDM IMPLEMENTATION IN THE FOUR DISTRICTS

Perhaps the most critical finding to date from our study of SBDM in four rural Kentucky school districts is that SBDM does, indeed, give councils significant authority over school functioning if individuals take the initiative to exercise that authority. While there were several councils in our study that played an advisory role to the principal, just over half of the councils became major decisionmakers at their schools. In many instances, however, active councils were dominated by educators, and parents played a minor role.

Extent of Shared Decision-Making

Easton et al (1993), in their study of 14 Chicago local school councils, categorized councils into four governance types: limited, moderate, balanced, and excessive. This framework is useful in classifying the functioning of school councils in our study, but some modification is required. While Easton and associates analyzed the governance style employed at council meetings, we examined the extent to which decision-making was shared among the role groups involved in SBDM. The primary measures used to make this determination were the nature and extent of participation in council meetings by council members and visitors, membership on SBDM committees, and council members' own assessments of the extent of shared decision-making at their schools. This analysis led us to categorize councils into one of three decision-making modes: balanced, educator-dominated, or principal-dominated.

Balanced councils are those in which all participants (i.e., principals, teachers, and parents) contribute relatively equally to council discussions and the decision-making process. Educator-dominated councils are those in which teachers share in the decision-making process with the principal, but parents are left on the fringes, often without adequate information to make informed decisions. Principal-dominated councils essentially act as advisory committees to the principal.

After two years of SBDM, only one of the seven councils appeared to have achieved balanced decision-making--although this school appears to be regressing toward a principal-dominated mode in 1993-94 under the leadership of a new principal. At three schools, decision-making was dominated by educators, but two of these schools have recently shown a move toward greater parent participation in SBDM. Decision-making at the remaining three schools was mostly the principals' prerogative, with councils serving as endorsers or advisors.

Balanced Decision-Making

The school with the most balanced decision-making model, got off to a rocky start two years ago. The district had a history of strong parent involvement. Some teachers feared that parents would try to dominate the council. Council members reported that teacher council members initially

voted as a bloc, motives were suspect, and one parent and one teacher consistently disagreed. By the end of the council's first year, however, it operated as a cohesive group. Some council members attributed this to the SBDM training they had received, while others attributed it to getting to know one another better. All council members served on the council for two consecutive years, and teacher and parent members went to a local restaurant together for informal discussions after council meetings. Often during those discussions, teachers acquainted the parents with some of the nitty-gritty details of school life and politics that were not aired at the public meetings.

At meetings observed the first two years, the principal facilitated, but did not dominate, council discussions. Parent and teacher council members were outspoken. Council members talked through issues until they reached consensus, then voted on motions that were formally moved and seconded. Almost all votes were unanimous. Ample opportunity was provided for all council members to speak to issues, and observations suggest that all members felt free to contribute to discussions--and usually did.

The council encouraged participation in SBDM by holding meetings on regularly scheduled dates at times convenient for working parents (5:30 p.m. or later) and by routinely advertising meetings through the local media. Teachers and parents not on the council participated in SBDM by running for council seats, serving on committees, and attending council meetings to submit requests or listen to discussions of issues that affected them.

Parents played a major role in SBDM at this school, where a core group of parents had always been active. Some of this core group mobilized support for the election of 1993-94 parent members, resulting in a voter turnout of 170 parents--up from 35 the previous year. This number far surpassed the 10-25 parents voting at other SBDM schools in the study. Parent representation on council committees ranged from one to eight members in 1992-93, with parents outnumbering teachers on two standing committees. Some parents reported that they wished to serve on committees, but the sign-up sheets were full when they tried to volunteer. One or two parents were in the audience at most of the meetings observed in 1992-93--making this one of only two schools in the study with any regular attendance by parents prior to 1993-94. Topics as diverse as student assessment, computer software, configuration of the primary program, and formation of a health committee were raised by parents at council meetings.

Interestingly, all members of this council were replaced in 1993-94. A new principal was hired, and all council members chose not to serve another term because they each had served two years. Under the leadership of the new principal, decision-making has been less balanced. The principal brings pre-formulated plans or ideas to the council for their endorsement, which they typically give. One parent council member is quite vocal, but the council frequently follows the principal's lead.

Although this paper focuses primarily on the seven schools implementing SBDM in 1991 through 1993, we should note that two of the newest councils--which are in a different district than the one described above--have demonstrated balanced participation by all council members at their first meetings. As one of these councils wrote by-laws, for example, each council member freely made suggestions and comments. When the principal declared that the by-laws would be adopted that night, teachers protested that they needed more time to review what the council had written, and parents insisted that the PTA be given an opportunity to review the by-laws. Also at this school, a PTA representative usually attended council meetings.

Educator-Dominated Decision-making

Three councils in three districts appeared to be dominated by educators the first two years of SBDM. The principals and teachers did most of the talking in council meetings. Issues were usually brought to the council by the principal, teacher members, or teacher-dominated committees. Recent observations indicate that parents are becoming more active in decision-making on two of the three councils.

At two schools, strong leadership by principals who were committed to shared decision-making gave teachers the opportunity to play a strong role in SBDM from the beginning. Teachers at the third school assumed a strong role in their struggle to share in decisions with a principal whose management practices they opposed. The principal's resistance to SBDM figured in his reassignment at the end of the 1991-92 school year, and the council hired a principal who was more supportive of SBDM.

Educator participation. Interviews and observations at these three schools reveal that teachers often influence decision-making as much as principals, and sometimes change the principals' minds on specific issues. At one school, for instance, the principal proposed to an SBDM committee that parents be given a choice of what teacher their children were assigned to, but was talked down by the teachers on the committee. The same principal was at odds with the council on the selection of an assistant principal, but acquiesced to their wishes when she realized teachers on the council did not support her choice for assistant principal. At another school, the principal ultimately went along with council approval of a school budget that reduced funds for office expenses--a move he opposed.

Teachers not on the council at these schools generally participated in SBDM through committees. Much of these councils' work was handled at the committee level. Virtually all teachers served either on the council or on committees, and committees were dominated by teachers. Members of one of the three councils reported that few teachers were willing to serve on the council in 1992-93 because they were already busy participating on committees.

Parent participation. Parent participation in SBDM at schools with educator-dominated councils has been more problematic. Unlike the school with the balanced council, parents were not especially active at any of these schools prior to SBDM implementation. During the first year of SBDM, there was an initial surge in parent interest at two schools, which formed parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) for the first time in their histories. This interest tapered off, however, and those councils became less focused on parent involvement.

Parent council members at these three schools were not very vocal at the meetings observed the first two years. Two of the three councils recruited parents to serve on committees, but the third council recruited parents only for the PTO committee, which has since disbanded. One council initially required that a parent committee member be present for committees to transact business, but the requirement was recently eliminated because some committees were stymied by high parent absenteeism. Parent attendance at council meetings was poor at all three schools where educators dominate decision-making.

It should be noted that, even though decision-making was generally dominated by educators at these three schools, parents occasionally influenced decisions on topics about which they felt adequately informed, or attended meetings if a "hot topic" was on the agenda. At one school, for instance, approval of a discipline policy that reinstated corporal punishment was delayed for several months when parent council members insisted that the policy be rewritten to include adequate safeguards for students and parents.

At a school in a farming community, 16 visitors attended a council meeting when the council was scheduled to discuss disciplinary measures for students possessing tobacco on school grounds.

Progression toward balanced decision-making. Two of the three councils dominated by educators have shown recent signs of moving toward a more balanced model, with parent members often exerting considerable influence on council discussions and decisions. This has occurred by the election of more assertive parents and by veteran parent members being persistent or becoming more outspoken. At one school, for instance, a new parent member persisted in criticizing the principal's plan to track students who were failing math, and insisted that the council address the problem. On the same council, the third-term parent, a soft-spoken woman, suggested that parents and community members be recruited to serve on council committees. The principal repeatedly changed the subject when this suggestion was made, but teachers on the council eventually supported the parent and devised a plan for the principal to invite parents to sign up for committees at a PTO meeting.

At another school, a parent council member in her second term insisted that parent concerns about a new discipline policy be addressed before the policy was approved. This insistence required the council to schedule extra meetings to obtain parent input, delaying approval of the policy by a month. Several parents attended the special meetings. The policy that was ultimately approved contained several modifications that addressed those parents' concerns. The same parent council member recently took issue with the school's practice of implementing certain policies on a "trial basis" prior to presenting the policies to the council. This complaint resulted in the council formulating a policy that all council members, parents included, must be consulted before any new programs or policies that fall under the council's jurisdiction are implemented.

Principal-Dominated Councils

The remaining three councils in our study evolved as advisory groups to the principal. All three councils initially attempted to adopt shared decision-making through group training, frequent meetings to reach consensus on bylaws and to hire personnel, and establishment of council committees. Over time, however, the councils slipped into a decision-making mode in which principals brought ideas or plans to the council for their endorsement. The SBDM committee structure diminished or disappeared completely. Councils occasionally canceled regular meetings for lack of business to transact.

Teachers on principal-dominated councils reported that principals routinely obtained teacher input through faculty meetings and committees, but these committees often had no parent members, were not affiliated with SBDM, and seldom reported to the council. Parent council members frequently had no advance information on topics presented at meetings, and were mostly left on the fringes of decision-making.

Perhaps because principal-dominated councils were not key decisionmakers, interest in SBDM seems to be on the decline at these schools. Fewer teachers ran for council seats each year at two of the three schools, and all three schools had trouble filling parent vacancies. Two councils had only two nominees to fill parent slots the past three years, and few parents participated in council elections. At one school, formal nominations and voting for parent members did not occur for three years because only two parents could be persuaded to serve each time. Non-council members (teachers and parents) rarely attended council meetings, and committee reports became rare as the committees became less active.

No progression toward balanced decision-making has been observed at schools with principal-dominated councils. In many ways, these councils appeared to be closer to balanced decision-making in the early stages of SBDM implementation when council members were more sensitive to the need to change the decision-making structure. Since that time, these schools have slipped back into the pre-KERA mode of decision-making in which the principals involve teachers in decisions but do not channel decisions through councils. At two of these three schools, principals and teachers appeared to be satisfied with the arrangement, but some parent council members privately expressed dissatisfaction or confusion about their role on the council. At the third school, the few council members who initially pushed for more balanced decision-making gave up when their efforts were ineffective, and were replaced by members who were less willing to challenge the status quo.

Council Decisions

A school council, as defined by KERA, is responsible for setting school policy to provide an environment that enhances student achievement and helps the school meet goals established by the law. We were interested, therefore, in how decisions made by the various types of councils (balanced, educator-dominated, principal-dominated) affected educational reform in the schools.

We found that councils that practiced balanced or educator-dominated decision-making made key decisions in such areas as budget, scheduling, and to some extent, curriculum. All councils, regardless of their decision-making mode, participated in decisions about personnel and, to some extent, discipline. Beyond this, principal-dominated councils were not significantly involved in decision-making at their schools, other than to rubber-stamp decisions or plans developed by the principal or teacher committees.

In the first year of SBDM, we saw little evidence of councils organizing their work around helping students achieve KERA goals. Rather, councils appeared to approach their task in piecemeal fashion, targeting issues that were problematic at the school, such as student discipline. Over the past year-and-a-half, however, some councils have begun to take greater responsibility for school restructuring. Again, it is those councils that practice some degree of shared decision-making, whether balanced or educator-dominated, that appear to have a more global view of their role. Those councils viewed themselves, or are coming to view themselves, as ultimately responsible for overall school functioning and for ensuring that students achieve KERA goals. A closer look at council decisions in several key areas is provided below.

Personnel

KERA grants councils the authority to hire a principal when a vacancy occurs and to consult with the principal on filling other staff vacancies, but not to fire or transfer personnel. All councils in our study--even those that did little else--were significantly involved in hiring decisions at their schools. The sheer quantity of hiring decisions at some schools illustrates that, over time, council involvement in hiring can strongly influence the way schools function. Four councils in three districts hired principals over the past two years. In a single year, one council participated in hiring four teachers, three custodians, two instructional assistants, and one secretary. Another council participated in hiring an assistant principal, three teachers, an extended school coordinator, a receptionist, and a number of coaches.

While the principal is only required to consult with the council about hiring staff, council members at all seven schools reported that they participated in interviewing job applicants and generally reached consensus on

hiring decisions. Council members at two schools, however, expressed frustration at not being allowed to participate in preliminary decisions, such as advertising vacancies and screening applications.

Most teacher and parent council members at all sites said their councils hired the best-qualified applicants, even when pressured to do otherwise. A principal who was hired by a school council remarked:

> It was wonderful. It was very fair, very open, professionally done.... A lot of places, it's the "good-old-boy" system, and if you don't know somebody in the community, you really don't stand a chance. I think it's more difficult for a woman in Kentucky without this. This made it very, very fair. They all had their questions, they gave points for their questions, they added up the points, they tallied it.... They had a system, it was very fair.

Some instances of pressure to hire local applicants were reported. Two councils hired local applicants as assistant principals after earlier rejecting them as principals in favor of candidates from outside the district. Some council members at both sites reported that the local applicants were qualified for the job, but others reported that council members felt obligated to make amends to the local applicants.

At another school, council members reported that the superintendent told the council whom he wanted them to hire for principal a year before the position was open. When the vacancy became official, the superintendent forwarded one application to the council--the application of the person he wanted to hire. The superintendent told AEL staff that he did not widely advertise the position and only one person applied. The council interviewed and hired the one applicant. Two council members said they thought the applicant was well-qualified for the job, but they believed it would have been fairer if there had been a larger number of applicants from which to choose.

Teacher council members at two schools reported that they have taken heat from colleagues or administrators for not hiring local applicants. In one district, a parent council member reported being ostracized by other community members after she voted to hire an applicant from outside the community rather than a less-qualified, local applicant. Thus, it appears that school councils are subjected to the same political pressure many local school boards experienced when they were responsible for hiring decisions.

Discipline

In addition to personnel decisions, all councils in our study initially assumed responsibility for developing school discipline policies. Policies developed by councils during 1991-92, when a temporary ban on corporal punishment was in effect statewide, generally included the option of assigning students to some sort of detention program, such as after-school or Saturday detention, or in-school suspension. After the ban expired in 1992-93, councils at four schools (in three districts) considered the possibility of reinstating corporal punishment. Two councils did so.

Councils with balanced or educator-dominated decision-making monitored or revised their discipline policies, while principal-dominated councils allowed such modifications to occur outside their purview. For instance, a council that practiced principal-dominated decision-making developed a discipline policy in 1991-92 that established an in-school suspension program. When the council hired a new principal in 1992-93, one of his first actions was to replace that in-school suspension program with an after-school detention program. This principal reported that he consulted teachers about the change. Teachers and parents on the council reported that they were happy

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with the change--yet this modification to the discipline policy was never approved by the council.

Budget

Although all SBDM councils in the state have the authority to manage the school budget, not all have chosen to do so. In our study, the council that practiced balanced decision-making, as well as two of the three educator-dominated councils, assumed this responsibility. At one of these schools, the lure of managing the school budget was a partial incentive to vote for SBDM because teachers were unhappy that the principal did not share budget information or procedures with them. Budgeting was one of the first tasks assumed by this council. A finance committee was formed to develop the budget, and the committee advertised all meetings in the local newspaper. Draft copies of the budget were shared at a faculty meeting. Although this council struggled with the principal over other issues, management of the budget enabled the council to exercise the authority granted them by KERA, and apparently contributed to the development of a school culture in which shared decision-making is now considered the norm.

Budget management was not an adversarial issue at the other two schools, where principals supported council management of the budget. Budget committees developed the budget each year, and councils approved teachers' purchase requests.

Reports from all three schools suggested that teachers were generally satisfied with council management of the budget. Teachers at two of the three schools commented that the budgeting process became more equitable when the council began handling the budget.

The authority to make budget decisions also empowered councils to play the central role in school change. Those councils making decisions about the instructional budget saw themselves as responsible for overall school improvement. Approval of teachers' purchase requests familiarized councils and their budget committees with materials and strategies teachers were using to implement the primary program, develop portfolios, and teach real-life tasks and problem-solving skills. The council at one school allocated more money in 1992-93 to the math and science departments due to a perceived need to upgrade instruction in those departments. When state assessment results released in 1993 revealed low scores in all subject areas, the council allocated funds equally among departments.

School Schedules

Three councils, two elementary and one high school, made decisions about the school schedule. At the elementary schools, the councils' scheduling committees develop the school schedule each year.

The principal who led the most balanced council reported that the scheduling committee prepared the schedule much earlier in the year than he did. The committee included joint teacher planning time in the daily schedule so that every elementary teacher could plan with special area teachers at least once a week. Teachers generally reported satisfaction with the work of the council.

At the other elementary school, no parent members served on the scheduling committee because the council viewed this as the teachers' domain. The schedule approved by the council in 1991-92 created some conflict when the council was forced to cut back on music instruction because music classes were over capsize. This cutback resulted in loss of teacher planning time, and

council members reported that they took some heat from colleagues over this. Since that time, teachers reported general satisfaction with the council's efforts to provide teachers with blocks of planning time, and to accommodate teachers who wished to plan together. This council recently approved modifying the schedule to give fourth-grade teachers a larger block of instructional time in the morning, in the hope that this would improve fourth-graders' performance on the state assessment.

The high school council, which is educator-dominated, obtained faculty approval to move to a seven-period day for the 1993-94 school year in order to offer chemistry to all students who signed up for the course. In 1993-94, the council has continued to discuss and investigate alternative scheduling options, such as a four-period day.

Curriculum and Instruction

While the councils in our study were slow to get into issues related to curriculum and instruction, councils that practiced balanced or educator-dominated decision-making were more likely to make decisions that affected instruction and to monitor and modify their curricular decisions as on ongoing responsibility. Principal-dominated councils tended to make curriculum and instruction decisions only when required and typically did not follow-up on those decisions.

There have been recent indications that the release of state assessment results in the fall of 1993 may spur some councils into playing a stronger role in curriculum and instruction issues. Again, it is only the balanced or educator-dominated councils that have begun moving in this direction. A closer look at council decisions to date in the area of curriculum and instruction is provided below.

Primary program. Prior to the 1993-94 school year, the major issue related to curriculum and instruction for elementary school councils was developing an action plan for the KERA-mandated nongraded primary program. The state required that councils approve these plans. This requirement led three of the five elementary school councils--one balanced, one educator-dominated, and one principal-dominated--to assign the task to council committees. At the remaining two elementary schools, however, councils merely signed off on plans developed by the primary teachers.

Since that time, two of the councils, one balanced and one educator-dominated, continued to assume responsibility for modifications to the primary program plans. For instance, the balanced council received permission from the school board to adjust the beginning and ending times of the primary school day in 1992-93 in order to give teachers more planning time. When the teachers requested that this continue in 1993-94, the new parent council members held a meeting for parents of primary students to obtain their input into the issue. The night of the vote on this issue, the parent members presented the council with a list of concerns that parents had expressed. The council voted to continue the early beginning and early dismissal for primary students, but addressed parent concerns about lack of after-school supervision by agreeing to house students in the cafeteria, library, or computer room until parents arrived to pick them up.

The same council approved a change in the primary classroom configuration for the 1993-94 school year. Primary teachers asked the council to allow dual-age classrooms (K/1 and 2/3) rather than the more multi-aged classes they taught in 1992-93. After much discussion, including financial ramifications, the council approved dual-age classrooms.

At the other school, the instructional practices committee of the SBDM council evaluated the primary plan at the end of 1992-93, made some minor modifications for 1993-94, and submitted the plan to the council for approval.

Math instruction. Councils at both high schools--one with educator-dominated and the other principal-dominated decision-making--devoted considerable time to discussing complaints that too many students are failing college-prep math courses. In both instances, there were indications that the problem was the teaching methods of certain teachers. Because councils have no authority to transfer teachers and were reluctant to confront individuals about their methods, both councils tried to remedy the problem by working with the math departments.

The council at one school, where decision-making is dominated by the principal, directed the math department to conduct a self-study. The resulting report identified the teaching of problem solving as a deficit area. The math department issued a one-page handout to all faculty members on how to teach problem-solving skills. No further action was taken until a different set of parents voiced the same complaint at a council meeting early in the 1993-94 school year. Teachers on the council expressed uncertainty about what the parents expected the council to do about the problem. Before the meeting ended, the principal said he would meet with the math department himself and report to the parents at the next meeting. Minutes from the next meeting indicate that the principal informed the council that he had met with the district instructional supervisor and the concerned parents. Sources at the school reported that the principal and district instructional supervisor convinced the parents that students' failure was due to factors other than poor teaching, such as inadequate preparation prior to high school, or students signing up for courses that were too advanced for them.

At the other school, where decision-making is educator-dominated, the principal recommended offering "basic" (lower-level) college-prep math courses to enable students having difficulty in math to meet college entrance requirements. Some council members questioned this solution because it did not address the underlying instructional problems and because they feared it was not in line with KERA expectations. A parent council member observed, "We're watering it down and letting the teacher not teach to the student that way." Nevertheless, the council ultimately approved a course schedule that included three levels of math courses: a college-prep track, a "basic" college-prep track, and a non-college track. Interestingly, this same council discontinued tracking in English and social studies classes, as requested by these two departments.

1993-94 developments. As mentioned earlier, the release of state assessment results have spurred some councils into taking greater responsibility for curriculum and instruction. The most balanced council planned a curriculum workday in which teachers at all grade levels coordinated instructional units. The same council is currently working on aligning the curriculum.

Two educator-dominated councils have begun developing schoolwide plans for improving student assessment scores. The council at one school recently spearheaded a plan to help teachers learn instructional methods in line with the KERA assessment, such as how to write, teach, and score open-ended questions. The curriculum committee at another school announced in February 1994 that they would begin work on curriculum alignment, using the model curriculum framework from the state.

Factors That Facilitate or Impede SBDM

Our findings to date reveal that KERA empowers school councils to make significant decisions about their schools, if they choose to exercise this authority. The question that arises, then, is why has SBDM brought about shared decision-making at some schools and not others? We can identify several critical factors that facilitate or impede effective SBDM implementation: the principal's support and facilitation of SBDM, leadership by other council members, neglect of parent involvement by educators, and council training.

The Principal's Support and Facilitation

Principals, as school leaders and chairs of SBDM councils, play a key role in the extent to which decision-making is shared. At the schools in our study, some principals offered leadership that enabled teachers and parents to participate in decision-making, while others did not provide this leadership. Principals facilitated SBDM in one of two ways: by serving as the chief advocate for SBDM at their schools or by allowing others to assume leadership in decision-making.

The principal who led the most "balanced" council in our study facilitated SBDM implementation primarily through a non-authoritarian management style. This was the school that was initially forced to implement SBDM by the school board, and no one at the school was prepared to provide leadership in SBDM. This principal enabled shared decision-making to occur by working with other council members as a member of the team. He did not dominate council discussions but facilitated meetings by moving down the agenda as efficiently as possible. The principal did not appear to feel threatened by the strong role parents and teachers played. He willingly shared power with the council. He sided with the council on several occasions when it's authority was challenged by actions of the central office.

Principals at two of the schools with educator-dominated councils were vocal advocates of SBDM from the start. These principals saw to it that all issues that fell under the council's jurisdiction were routed through the council, carefully polled council members at meetings to make sure all opinions were heard, and helped the council work toward reaching consensus.

In contrast, we have seen principals impede shared decision-making by dominating council discussions, bringing pre-packaged ideas to the council for their endorsement, failing to bring the council to closure on concerns raised by council members or observers, withholding information needed to prepare a budget, and failing to implement council decisions. One principal failed to schedule council meetings for several months in 1991-92, and only began doing so after council members confronted him. A council member remarked:

> I thought our facilitator was really dragging his feet on site-based.... We were just neglecting to have meetings. They were not getting scheduled. And then the one meeting we had, there was no agenda and apparently nothing to do, and I just didn't feel that way. I thought there was a lot we should be working on.

Leadership by Other Council Members

Although principals played a strong role in facilitating or impeding SBDM, we saw instances when leadership by other council members was the central force in bringing about shared decision-making. At the school with the most balanced decision-making model, for instance, parents and teachers on the council provided as much leadership in getting SBDM up and running as did

the principal. At a high school where the principal opposed SBDM, a core group of teachers initiated the vote on SBDM and took leadership in getting the council to assume responsibility for budget management. Since that time, these same teachers have continued to play a strong role in establishing a culture of shared decision-making at their school.

Parent council members recently played a strong role in moving two educator-dominated councils toward more balanced models. As mentioned earlier, parents on one council pushed for improvements in the math program and persisted in their efforts to recruit parents to serve on SBDM committees. At another school, a parent council member increased parent participation in SBDM and influenced the school discipline policy by calling parents for their opinion on the policy, and insisting that all parent concerns be addressed.

At two of the new SBDM schools, parent council members voiced their concerns about KERA and school improvement from the beginning of SBDM implementation. These parents brought issues before the councils and assertively influenced decisions. This assertive approach by parents appeared to be welcomed by the educators on the councils.

A key factor that enabled council members other than the principal to help bring about shared decision-making was that these council members have enjoyed some measure of support from their peers. At the schools where councils played an advisory role, a few council members initially pushed for shared decision-making, but were unable to garner support from their peers. This lack of support apparently resulted from the fact that teachers felt they already had sufficient input into decisions, and parent council members did not drum up support from other parents for their efforts. In addition, the council members who pushed for change were not persistent for fear of damaging congenial relations.

Neglect of Parent Involvement by Educators

The relative lack of parent participation in SBDM is a statewide problem, as reported in a separate study of SBDM in Kentucky (David, 1993), and a survey conducted by the Louisville Courier-Journal (Schaver, 1994). While the problem may be partly due to parents not having time to participate, we have seen evidence that educators do not encourage--and in some cases, do not welcome--parent involvement. At most schools in our study, there was little ongoing effort to inform parents of how to participate in SBDM. In addition, parent council members were not provided with sufficient information to fully participate in decision-making.

At most schools, the lack of effort to involve parents appeared to be a matter of negligence rather than an overt attempt to thwart parent involvement. Council efforts to advertise their meetings became increasingly half-hearted and intermittent at some of the study schools. A parent who attended a meeting of a principal-dominated council late in the 1992-93 school year commented:

> It has taken me a year, just about the whole year, to figure out that you're really supposed to come to these [council meetings]. I didn't even know what you did at one of these meetings.

In the first two years of SBDM, four councils scheduled meetings at inconvenient times for working parents or community members. A few councils held meetings later in the day but abandoned the practice when it did not result in larger audience attendance. At the meetings we observed, four of the seven councils sat around a single table facing in, which shut out audience members and made it difficult to hear. Most councils distributed meeting agendas to audience members at council meetings. At five schools,

however, no substantial information about policies or programs under consideration was routinely made available.

There were signs of overt resistance to parent involvement at some schools. This resistance seemed to stem from mistrust toward parents on the part of educators. For example, one council failed to place parents on SBDM committees for two years. Parent council members on another council expressed frustration that they lacked information necessary for full participation in council decisions. A teacher on the same council shared some of her misgivings about parents participating in decision-making:

> Some of our parents are sitting down there with ... a high school education, and they come in and do volunteer work, and ... they see things going on, but to understand the concepts ... behind it, they don't.

Two principals in two different districts expressed fear of SBDM attracting parents with unreasonable demands or with inadequate knowledge. We observed these principals dispatching the topic of parent involvement at council meetings by changing the subject, offering some reason why the topic should not be dealt with, or insisting that everything that could possibly be done to increase parent involvement had already been tried. Parent council members have been reluctant to persist in the face of such recalcitrance. A former parent council member at a school with a principal-dominated council remarked:

> I know from where I work, if you do too much ruffling, you get a label--you do everywhere in every job. I just hope it gets beyond that where people can feel comfortable saying what they think.

Council Training

Our observations support the suggestions of other SBDM researchers that councils need more knowledge of group process and decision-making skills, the content of many issues facing them, and strategies for encouraging widespread involvement in the SBDM process (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1991; Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1993; David, 1993). The councils in our study have received some training each year that SBDM has been in place, but the training consisted of one-shot workshops with no follow-up support or evaluation. In addition, turnover of council members often resulted in only the newest members participating in training. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) point out that this sort of one-shot training for individuals is ineffective at bringing about long-term, organizational change.

This is illustrated by the experiences of four councils in one district. All four councils, along with central office administrators and school board members, participated in a two-day planning and training retreat before formal SBDM implementation began. The training included instruction in use of the local SBDM policy manual, which offered specific guidelines on moving systematically toward greater involvement in decision-making at the school. The guidelines suggested timelines and procedures for taking on specific policy functions, for writing an action plan for each function, and for evaluating the council's work. Since that time, training has been spotty and typically attended by only the newest council members. Only one of the four councils, through the efforts of a vigilant principal, used the policy manual to keep themselves focused and on-task. The remaining three councils made little use of the manual, and all three evolved into advisory groups.

Some councils, however, made good use of their "one-shot" training, even when no follow-up was provided. The council with the most balanced decision-making model received training as a group early in the SBDM implementation

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process. Council members reported that this training enabled them to move beyond individual differences and begin functioning as a group. This council found the training so important that they advised their successors to receive training as a group before holding their first meeting. The new council did so, but subsequently allowed the new principal to dominate many decisions.

Conclusion

SBDM as mandated by KERA provides school councils with considerable authority to make decisions at their schools. Some councils, largely through the efforts of key individuals, took advantage of this authority and become important decisionmakers at their schools, while others played a minor role. Even where councils exercised considerable authority, however, parents were often left on the fringes of decision-making. It appears that some extra effort is required to enlist parent involvement where such involvement is not part of the school's tradition--especially in the current economic climate in which many parents work outside the home. If parents are to participate fully in SBDM, educators must learn to share their expertise, and parents must assert their right to the knowledge they need for full participation. Both parties must be willing to expend the time and energy necessary to bring all council members up to the knowledge level needed to make policy decisions about the school.

We found that shared decision-making is most likely to occur in schools where principals facilitate SBDM and where parents are assisted to participate fully in decision-making. We have also noted that SBDM can be effectively implemented even when circumstances are not ideal if informed individuals exert leadership.

Also, our preliminary data suggest that councils that practice shared decision-making view themselves as responsible for overall school functioning. Those councils are likely to expand their operations into areas that directly affect students, such as budgeting, curriculum, and instruction. In addition, councils that manage the budget have a more global view of their role in the school and in KERA implementation; therefore, budget management may serve as a vehicle for moving councils into more extensive decision-making.

In conclusion, Kentucky policymakers have established an effective mechanism for shared decision-making that can promote educational change. Further support by the state is needed to educate and train local participants to take advantage of their new authority. In addition, local participants must assume responsibility for using SBDM to improve schools. In the words of Fullan and Stiegelbauer in The New Meaning of Educational Change (1991):

> ...As individuals we cannot wait for or take as sufficient the actions or policy decisions of others. It would be a mistake to conclude that the solution is for policymakers and administrators to become experts in the change process... The only solution is that the whole school--all individuals--must get into the change business; if individuals do not do this, they will be left powerless (p. 353).

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